

Leftward Focus versus Rightward Focus: the Kwa-Bantu Conspiracy

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1. Introduction

Although the Kwa and Bantu languages are both Niger-Congo, they display very striking differences. Table 1, adapted from Good (2005) citing Westermann & Bryan (1952), gives a snapshot of some outstanding properties of these two language families.

Table 1: Kwa vs. Bantu prototype (Adapted from Good 2005)¹

Kwa	Bantu
1. Labiovelar <i>kp, gb</i>	Labiovelars not common
2. Monosyllabic words (CV)	Canonical verb roots: CVC
3. Inexistent/residual noun class	Exuberant noun class
4. Rigid word order	Apparent free word order
5. Dative expressed by serial verb with <i>give</i>	Apparent free word order
6. No agreement	Dative with applicative morpheme
7. Basic past vs. non-past distinction	Various tense distinctions, and fine-grained past distinctions

The property under 3 appears the most striking for a non-bantuist. Indeed, while Bantu languages display robust noun class systems with intricate properties, only a very few Kwa (e.g. Twi) show some residual noun class system. In the Gungbe (Kwa) sentences under (1a-b), bold typeface indicates that this language has two word initial vowels: *ò-* and *à-* that could possibly be leftovers of a very remote noun class system. However, the parentheses in (1a) show that *ò-* can be dropped in actual speech, but not *à-* (1a. vs. 1b). In addition, these elements never trigger agreement: two properties atypical of genuine noun classes.

- (1) a. (**Ò**)kpá cè nà hó [Gungbe]
 fence 1sg-Poss Fut collapse
 ‘My fence will collapse’
 b. **À**tín cè hó
 tree 1sg-Poss collapse
 ‘My tree collapsed’
 c. Mí dó kpá ná Yéti
 1pl plant fence give Yeti
 ‘We built a fence for Yeti’

The sentences under (1) further illustrate other Kwa properties listed in table 1. Most words are monosyllabic; there is a simple past versus non-past distinction (1a. vs 1c); there is no agreement of any sort (e.g. subject verb or possessive possessor); and

¹ The Gungbe (Kwa) data come from my own work, but the Bantu examples are reproduced as in the original sources. In the context of the Kwa versus Bantu comparison presented in this paper, it is important to keep in mind that the characterization of these language families is based on only a few sample languages and further detailed study is needed before we get a more precise picture.

(4)	Order	Chichewa	Sesotho
	SVO	Njûchi zináwáluma alenje	Ntja ejele dijo
	VOS	Zináwáluma alenje njûchi	Ejele dijo ntja
	OVS	Alenje zináwáluma njûchi	Dijo edijele ntja
	VSO	Zináwáluma njûchi alenje	Edijele ntja dijo
	SOV	Njûchi alenje zináwáluma	Ntja dijo edijele
	OSV	Alenje njûchi zináwáluma	Dijo ntja edijele
		‘The bees bit the hunters’	‘The dog ate the food’

It appears from this superficial description that Kwa languages tend to minimize morpho-syntactic computation where Bantu maximize everything. Given the discrepancy between the two language families, one may just stop here and build up a hermetic border between these two groups that will ruin any endeavour of comparison.

This paper takes up the challenge of contrasting Kwa and Bantu when it comes to the expression of information structure. The discussion suggests that these languages slice the clause structure in two domains for encoding topic and focus. Under the view that the clause structure includes peripheral domains (above IP and VP) where specific functional positions host topic and focus expressions (e.g. TopP vs. FocP), I propose that Kwa languages use the higher outer functional layer (i.e. above IP), while Bantu seems to mainly resort to the VP-periphery. Therefore, the two language groups conspire to provide us with empirical evidence for the existence of an articulated left periphery (call it an edge) above IP and VP (Rizzi 1997, Belletti 2002).

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 is a basic description of how Kwa and Bantu languages encode information structure in their grammar. It is shown that these languages share significant properties when it comes to the clausal left periphery, but differ strikingly in contexts where a constituent occurring clause-internally encodes information structure (e.g. in situ focus and wh-questions). Building on this discussion, section 3 raises certain implications of the proposed analysis for seemingly diverse empirical facts such as subject versus object asymmetry in focus structures and verb focusing.

2. Information structure and clause structure

This section presents crucial points of comparison between Kwa and Bantu languages when it comes to the expression of topic and focus sentences. I start with Kwa languages.

2.1 Kwa

In most Kwa, topic (i.e. discourse-linked referents on which the speaker provides a comment), and focus (i.e. a constituent conveying non-presupposed information, or expressing a quantificational-like operation, Kiss 1998:1) are realised in the clausal left periphery. In such cases, the focused or topicalized constituents occur in a pre-subject position where they are very often associated with a marker. The Gungbe sentences under (5) illustrate such left peripheral markers for topic (5a) and focus (5b). In addition, topics, unlike focus, involve a resumptive pronoun inside the proposition.

- (5) a. Ûn nywèn d̥ò Yétì_i yà Dòsú ná dà-è_i
 1sg know that Yeti Top Dosu Fut marry-3sg
 ‘I know that as for Yeti, Dosu will marry her’
- b. Ûn nywèn d̥ò Dòsú wè ná dà Yétì
 1sg know that Dosu Foc Fut marry Yeti
 ‘I know that DOSU will marry Yeti’

In accounting for these structures, I suggested in previous work that the Kwa languages provide strong empirical evidence for the cartographic approach to the clausal left periphery. In this framework the topic and focus markers head distinct projections within the clausal left periphery as indicated in (6a). Under this representation, topic and focus constructions involve movement of the topic or focus constituent to the specifier of the relevant phrase as depicted in (6b-c).

- (6) a. [_{ForceP} [_{Force°} d̥ò [_{TopP} [_{Top°} yà [_{FocP} [_{Foc°} wè [_{FinP}]]]]]]]]]
 b. Ûn nywèn [_{ForceP} [_{Force°} d̥ò [_{TopP} Yétì [_{Top°} yà [_{FocP} [_{Foc°} [_{FinP} Dòsú ná dà-è_[Yétì]]]]]]]]]]]
 c. Ûn nywèn [_{ForceP} [_{Force°} d̥ò [_{TopP} [_{Top°} [_{FocP} Dòsú [_{Foc°} wè [_{FinP} t_{Dòsú} ná dà Yétì]]]]]]]]]]

In order to understand these facts, it is crucial to keep in mind that the markers *yà* and *wè*, have no other usage or function in the language than expressing topic and focus, respectively. See Aboh (2003, 2004, 2006a, b) and references cited there for discussion.

With regard to focus proper, we can define two strategies: non-verbal versus verbal focusing. Non-verbal focusing targets any non-verbal category, which must front to the left of the focus marker *wè*. We find a bare noun in (7a), an (in)definite specific DP in (7b-c), an adverbial phrase in (7d), a locative phrase in (7e), and an adjectival phrase in (7f).

- (7) a. [Mótò] wè Dòsú kù wá
 car Foc Dosu drive come
 ‘Dosu came by CAR’
- b. [Mótò dé] wè Dòsú kù wá
 car Det Foc Dosu drive come
 ‘Dosu came with A CERTAIN CAR’
- c. [Mótò ló] wè Dòsú kù wá
 car Det Foc Dosu drive come
 ‘Dosu came with THAT CAR [i.e., the aforementioned one]’
- d. Ďě é gò sòn yòvòtòmè lé, trólóló wè Dòsú
 as 3sg return from Europe this, immediately Foc Dosu
 dà Yétì
 marry Yeti
 ‘As soon as he returned from Europe, Dosu IMMEDIATELY married Yeti’
- e. Cócì mè wè Dòsú dà Yétì tè
 church in Foc Dotu marry Yeti Loc
 ‘Dosu married Yeti IN CHURCH’
- f. Kpèví wè Yétì tè b̥ò mí d̥ó jè míd̥è sí
 small Foc Yeti Cop and 1pl Mood fall ourselves hand
 ‘Yeti was SMALL/YOUNG when we became independent’

A few remarks are in order here, but the interested reader is referred to Aboh (2003, 2004, 2006a, b), and references cited there for a detailed discussion. As is the case in many African languages, focus constructions in Kwa display a subject versus object asymmetry: Subject focus always requires an ex-situ strategy that forces the occurrence of the focus marker, as indicated by the following question-answer pair.

- (8) a. Ménù wè wá? b. Kòfí *(wè) wá
 Who Foc come Kofi Foc come
 ‘Who came?’ ‘KOFI came’

Non-subject focus, however, involves two strategies, in situ (9a) versus ex-situ (9b). These imply two different information structures roughly corresponding to Kiss’ (1998) new information versus identificational focus (see also Aboh, in press).

- (9) a. Ménù wè à yró? b. Ùn yró Kòfí
 Who Foc 2sg call 1sg call Kofi
 ‘Who did you call?’ ‘I called KOFI_[New information focus]’
 c. Kòfí wè ùn yró
 Kofi Foc 2sg call
 ‘I called KOFI_[Identificational focus]’

As is clear from the examples in (8) and (9), non-verbal focusing and wh-questions involve the same syntactic process: fronting of the focused or wh-phrase to the left of the focus marker. Crucially, in-situ wh-questions are excluded in these languages, and example (10) can only be interpreted as an echo question.

- (10) À yró ménù?
 2sg call who
 * ‘Who did you call?’
 ‘You called who?’

Finally, non-verbal focusing allows for long distance extraction as indicated by example (11).

- (11) a. Été wè à sè ɖè Dòsú kù t_[été] wá
 what Foc 2sg hear that Dosu drive come
 ‘What did you hear that Dosu drove to come?’
 b. [Mótò ló] wè ùn sè ɖè Dòsú kù t_[mótò ló] wá
 car Det Foc 1sg hear that Dosu drive come
 ‘I heard that Dosu came with THAT CAR [i.e. the aforementioned one]’

The overall generalization is therefore that non-verbal focus constructions (including wh-questions) in Kwa involve fronting of a category to a position left adjacent to the focus marker. The process is not clause-bound and allows long distance extraction.

With regard to verbal focusing, two main strategies are attested in Kwa languages that all involve fronting of the verb (phrase). In Gungbe, for instance, the focused verb is fronted, and relates to an identical doublet IP-internally (12a). The percentage diacritic indicates that certain Gungbe speakers allow the focus marker to follow the fronted verb. In the Ewegbe example (12b) however, the fronted category

- (15) a. UThemba u-cabang-a **ukuthi** incwadi umfana kumele
 1aThemba 1SM-think-FV that 9book 1boy must
 a-yi-fund-e
 1SM-9OC-read-FV
 ‘Themba thinks that the book, the boy must read’ [Zeller 2004: 8]
- b. Ûn nywèn dḡ [kèké ló lé]_i yà Dòsú ná sà-yé_i
 1sg know that bicycle Det Pl Top Dosu Fut sell-3pl
 ‘I know that as for the bicycles, Dosu will sell them’

Under Cinque (1990) and much related work, the need for resumption in left dislocation structures results from their status as non-quantificational constructions. Therefore, the dislocated element cannot license a variable IP-internally. As extensively discussed in the literature, many languages circumvent this situation by allowing a properly licensed pronominal element to occur in the extraction site of the dislocated topic. Under this description, the object clitic in (14a, 15a) and the full pronoun in (14b) in Zulu as well as the Gungbe weak pronoun in (15b) represent language-specific devices for enabling the topic construction to converge (see Aboh 2004: 302 and references cited there).

In terms of this analysis therefore, topic constructions differ from focus constructions because the latter are quantificational and may tolerate an IP-internal variable bound by the focused constituent. While the Gungbe focused constructions discussed thus far support this view, supporting evidence in Bantu comes from Downing (2006: 7) who shows that leftward focus does not involve resumption in Chitumbuka. This is illustrated by example (16a) where the sentence-initial focus constituent is an answer to the question ‘*what did they give to the children?*’ while in (16b) the focused constituent *maize* is being contrasted to some other crop.

- (16) a. Ma-búuku βa-ka-pása βáana [Chitumbuka, Downing 2006: 7]
 books they-tns-give children
 ‘They gave the children BOOKS’
- b. Ngóoma ti-zamu-limilira namachéero
 maize we-Fut-weed tomorrow
 ‘We will weed MAIZE tomorrow’

Such leftward focused constituents which bind an empty category IP-internally are also found in certain Grassfield Bantu. Such examples are found in Tuki and Nweh, where the focused constituent immediately precedes a focus marker. With these Grassfield Bantu languages, we reach a complete parallel between Kwa and Bantu. Compare the following examples to the Gungbe ones discussed previously.

- (17) a. Abongo **odzu** a-ma-kos-en-a agee waa yendze idzo
 Abongo Foc SM-P2-buy-Appl-Fv wife his house yesterday
 ‘It is ABONGO who bought his wife a house yesterday’
 [Tuki, Biloa 1997: 51]
- b. Njikem **mḡ** a kè? nćúū akendḡḡ
 Njikem Foc Agr P1 boil plantains
 ‘NJIKEM boiled plantains’
 [Nweh, Nkemnji 1995: 136]

Similarly to Kwa (e.g. Gungbe), these Bantu languages also allow ex-situ wh-phrases

- (21) a. Puta a-dingam ane? [Tuki, Biloa 1997: 52]
 Puta SM-loves who
 ‘Puta loves who’
 b. Puta O-endam n(a) adongo ni ?
 Puta SM-goes to village when
 ‘When does Puta go to the village?’
- (22) a. *Yétì m̀̀n m̀̀nù?
 Yeti see who
 ‘Who did Yeti see?’
 b. *Yétì m̀̀n Súrù hwèténù?
 Yeti see Suru when
 ‘When did Yeti see Suru?’

Together with the data discussed in section 2.2., we reach the conclusion that most Bantu exhibit *ex-situ* and *in-situ* *wh*-questions, while Kwa display *ex-situ* *wh*-questions only. In other words, while topics and more crucially focus constituents are forced to front to the left periphery in Kwa languages, Bantu languages seem to allow for two domains where such elements can occur: leftward (i.e. within the clausal left periphery, as in Kwa) or rightward (i.e. within the vicinity of the verb, unlike Kwa).

Close inspection of the latter option reveals that what might look superficially like a classical case of *in-situ* focus or *wh*-question hides a more systematic pattern: The focused category or *wh*-phrase must occur in a derived position immediately after the verb. A case in point is Aghem. In this language, focused constituents and *wh*-phrases must occur in a position right adjacent to the verb. The position is not case-related and can host any focused category or *wh*-phrase. To see this, let us first consider the linear order of constituents in Aghem as described in (23a-b) (Watters 1979, Hyman and Watters 1984, Hyman 1979, 2005).

- (23) a. Tí-bvú ò-bìghà m̀̀ m̀̀ zǎ kí-bé né
 dogs two P1 eat fufu today
 ‘The two dogs ate fufu today’ [Hyman 2005: 1]
 b. S...Aux...Verb...(Focus)...Object...Adjunct

Compared to the neutral sentence (23a), example (24a) shows that a contrastively focused DP object must follow the verb. In this example, the focused object is right adjacent to the verb, while the subject occurs in the canonical position (i.e. pre-verbally). Further note that the locative adjunct, which follows the object as in (23a), is now displaced to a pre-verbal position. This is indicated by the sequence *án* ‘sóm’ ‘in the farm’ in (24a). This process forces the object to occur last in the sentence. At this stage, the Bantu facts recall scrambling phenomena in Germanic, where elements that normally appear within the VP scramble out of this domain in order for focus assignment to fall on the object (Manfredi 1997, Drubig 2003).

Sentence (24b) involving a focused subject shows that, in this case, the subject immediately follows the verb and precedes both the theme and the locative PP. This indicates that the focus position is not sentence-final. On the other hand, the canonical subject position includes an expletive. In a similar vein, focus constructions in (24c-d) show that the focused adjunct (or PP) immediately follows the verb. In both of these cases the focused adjunct occurs in a different position than the position it occupies in neutral sentences (e.g. 23b).

- (24) a. Énáǎ mǎ áǎ ‘sóm zi [bé-'kó]
 Inah Past in farm eat fufu
 ‘Inah ate FUFU in the farm’
 [Aghem, Hyman 2005:1]
- b. Á mǎ zi [énáǎ] bé-'kó áǎ ‘sóm
 Expl Past eat Inah fufu in farm
 ‘INAH ate fufu in the farm’
- c. Tǐ-bvú tǐ-bǐghà mǎ zǐ [né] bé-'kó
 dogs two Past eat today fufu
 ‘The two dogs ate fufu TODAY’
- d. Fil a-mo-zi [ang wo] be'-ko
 Friends SM-P2-eat with hand fufu
 ‘It was with (their) hands that the friends ate fufu’
 [Aghem, Biloa 1997: 46]

Aghem wh-phrases occur in the same focus position immediately after the verb (Hyman 2005). The sentence in (25a) illustrates an adjunct wh-phrase, while the example under (25b) represents a subject wh-phrase.

- (25) a. Tǐ-bvú tǐ-bǐghà mǎ zǐ zǐn bé-'kó?
 dogs two Past eat when fufu
 ‘When did the two dogs eat fufu?’
- b. À mǎ zǐ ndúghó bé-'kó né à?
 Expl Past eat who fufu today QM
 ‘Who ate fufu today?’

Unlike some other Bantu (e.g. Tuki), both ex-situ wh-questions at the clausal left periphery and in-situ wh-questions are impossible in Aghem. As a consequence, the sentences under (26) are ungrammatical because the wh-phrase has been fronted to the left periphery in (26a), while in (26b) the wh-phrase remains in-situ, that is, in its first merge position.

- (26) a. *Ndugho a-mo zi ki-be [Aghem, Biloa 1997: 48]
 who SM-P2 eat fufu
 ‘Who ate fufu?’
- b. *Fil a-mo-zi ki-be enzin?
 Friends SM-P2-eat fufu how

The Aghem data therefore lead to the conclusion that there is a fixed position immediately after the verb that serves to unambiguously mark focus. This conclusion is further supported by the following contrast between Tuki and Aghem. Both languages allow multiple wh-questions. Yet, Tuki and Aghem differ in an interesting way: In Tuki multiple wh-questions, one wh-phrase occurs in the clausal left periphery, while other wh-phrases remain in-situ (27).

- (27) Ane odzu a-ma-fenda ate twi? [Tuki, Biloa 1997: 102]
 Who Foc SM-P2-repair what how
 ‘Who fixed what how?’

Aghem, however, appears to be the opposite of Tuki. In this language, one *wh*-phrase occurs in the immediately post-verbal position, while others remain in-situ as in (28).

- (28) À m̀̀ z̃ĩ ndúghó kwòkò z̃ĩn? [Aghem, Hyman 2005: 1]
 Expl Past eat who what when
 ‘Who ate what when?’

Finally, Hyman (2005) reports that Aghem also has a focus marker *nó* that realises the post-verbal focus position and scopes over the element immediately to its left. In (29a), *nó* scopes over the verb, while in (29b) it takes scope over the object.

- (29) a. Tĩ-bvú tĩ-bĩghà m̀̀ z̃ĩ **nó** b́é-kó
 dogs two Past eat Foc fufu
 ‘The two dogs ATE fufu’ [Hyman 2005: 1]
 b. Z̃ĩ b́é-kó **nó**
 eat fufu Foc
 ‘eat FUFU’

These facts strongly indicate that the postverbal focus position is unique and has clear syntactic and discourse-related properties.

Though not all Bantu languages show similar patterns with Aghem, a piece of evidence that these languages use an immediately post-verbal position for marking focus comes from locative inversion which appears to be robust in Bantu (but non-existent in Kwa). The sentences in (30) show this construction in Chichewa and Sesotho.

- (30) a. Ku mu-dzi ku-li chi-tsîme
 17 3-village 17.Subj-be 7-well
 ‘In the village is a well’
 [Chichewa, Bresnan 1994: 77]
 b. Maseru basadi ba-ile kajeno
 Maseru 2women 2Agr-go-Perf today
 ‘To Maseru the women went today’
 [Sesotho, Demuth & Harford 1999: 9]

In accounting for locative inversion in Chichewa, Bresnan (1994: 85) concludes that the use of locative inversion in this language has “a special discourse function of presentational focus [...] in which the referent of the inverted subject is introduced or re-introduced on the (part of) scene referred to by the preposed locative.” Again, these facts reinforce the observation already made here (and in the literature) that at least *some* Bantu languages exhibit a non-case related position immediately right adjacent to the verb. This position has the following syntactic and discourse-related properties: (i) licensing this position repulses other arguments to the peripheries of the VP, (ii) the element occupying this position is necessarily a focused constituent (but see Buell 2005, 2006, 2007 for a critical discussion of the focus interpretation of this position in Zulu). Given these two properties and recent studies on the interaction between information structure and clause structure, the question obviously arises what is the structural location of this position (see Aboh, Hartmann & Zimmermann, in press., for some discussion).

2.4 On the possible existence of a ‘low’ focus phrase in Bantu

When we look at the Bantu data (especially those of Aghem) with a Kwa mind, a contrast emerges: While both Bantu and Kwa use the clausal left periphery to express (contrastive) focus and *wh*-questions (e.g. Gungbe, Tuki), certain Bantu languages exclusively use the postverbal position for the same purpose (Aghem). If, however, one is right in postulating a focus projection within the clausal left periphery for Kwa (Aboh 2004), the question naturally arises whether such a position could exist within the vicinity of the verb phrase in Bantu.

Data from Romance (e.g. Italian, French) may be of some relevance in answering this question. It is a well-known fact that Romance and Bantu share striking properties that call for a principled explanation. One such property is subject (and locative) inversion as illustrated previously for Bantu. Consider, for instance, the French equivalent of the Chichewa sentence (30a).

- (31) Dans le village se trouve un puits
 in the village pro find a well
 ‘In the village is a well’

Similarly, Belletti (1998, 2002, 2005) discusses Italian question-answer pairs as in (32) and shows that, even though a felicitous answer may display SV and VS order, the latter is by far the more ‘natural’ and accepted order, hence the bracketed star in (32a).

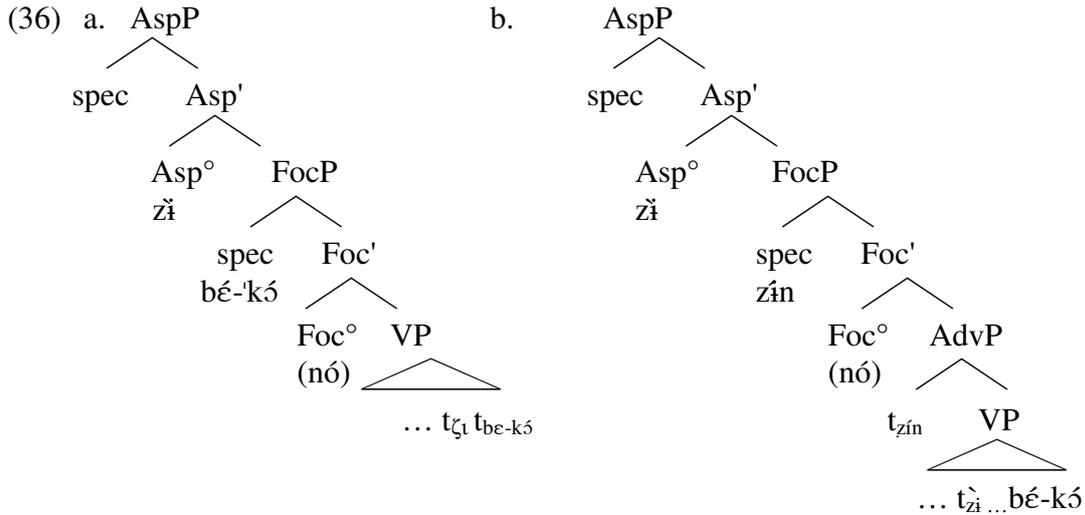
- (32) Chi ha parlato?
 Who has spoken
 a. (*)Gianni ha parlato
 Gianni has spoken
 b. ha parlato Gianni
 has spoken Gianni

Of relevance to our discussion is the fact that in Romance (as in Bantu) the postverbal subject is focused. In Italian, for instance, Cornish (2001: 113) reports that the type of focus obtained in such constructions may vary depending on the verb: unaccusative verbs allow for wide or narrow focus, while transitive verbs trigger narrow focus.

If we put the Kwa, Bantu, and Romance facts discussed thus far in perspective, we reach the description in (33) for the distribution of structural focus positions across these languages. By analogy to Gungbe or Tuki, I propose that Aghem *nó* plays a similar function as the Tuki or Gungbe focus markers, but occupies a focus head position in the VP-periphery.

- (33) Gungbe [XP + *wɛ*_[Focus marker]...[Subject...V.....]]
 Tuki [XP + *odzu*_[Focus marker]...[Subject...V.....]]
 Aghem/Italian/Other Bantu [.....V-Subject_[Focus].....]
 Aghem/Other Bantu [...[subject.....V-XP_[Focus].....]]
 Aghem [...[subject.....V-(XP)+*nó*_[Focus marker].....]]

Though apparently diverse, the sequences in (33) reduce to a single basic sequencing as in (34), which indicates a focus position (sometimes associated with a marker) to the left of the canonical subject and a focus position (also possibly associated with a marker) to the right of the verb.



Given that the verb moves across the focus marker *nó*, one may wonder why there is no violation of the Minimal Link Condition (MLC). Various technical solutions come to mind here (e.g. scattered deletion under Nunes 2004). However, in terms of current minimalist assumptions (Collins 2002, Chomsky 2005), one option that I would like to pursue here is to propose that the focus head *Foc* does not have any verbal or tense/aspect features that can value the uninterpretable tense/aspect features on the lexical verb. As such *Foc* does not represent an appropriate landing site for the verb that is attracted by the aspect head, and it does not count as a proper intervener.

Granting that this is the right characterisation, we can conclude that Aghem and similar Bantu languages provide us with the necessary empirical evidence that what languages of the Kwa-type express in the clausal left periphery, can be realised within the VP-periphery in other languages. Under the comparative approach to Kwa and Bantu adopted here, we reach the description in table 3.

Table 3: Information structure and word order in Kwa and Bantu

Expression strategies	Kwa	Bantu
Topic XP to the left (Left dislocation)	+	+
Focus XP to the left	+	?
Focus particle to the left	+	?
Question XP to the left	+	+
Focus XP in pre/post-V	-	+
Focus particle in pre/post-V	-	+
Wh-question in situ	-	+
Wh-question in pre/post-V	-	+
Topic XP to the right (Right dislocation)	-	+

(+) = commonly found within the language family,
 (-) = not commonly found within the language family,
 (?) = inconclusive facts at the moment of writing.³

³ In relation to this latter point, data discussed for Tumbuka and Tharaka may change the present state of affairs as to the settings of Bantu.

Taken seriously, this table suggests that the parametric variation between Kwa and Bantu, as well as typologically different languages, reduces to whether a language resorts to the clausal periphery and/or the VP periphery for the expression of information structure. Pending new findings (see e.g. discussions on Tumbuka and Tharaka), the variation may simply boil down to whether the discussed languages encode information structure within the VP periphery or not, since both Kwa and Bantu seem to have access to the clausal left periphery.

2.5 Is there an alternative to a low Focus Phrase in Bantu?

While the cartographic view I have adopted here is explored in various languages with some very interesting results (e.g. Nkemnji 1995, Biloa 1997, Rizzi 1997, Cinque 1999, Aboh 2004, Green 2007), the hypothesis that syntax may embed functional projections (e.g. topic, focus) that encode information structure is not uncontroversial (e.g. Zubizarreta 1998). With regard to the proposal I put forward here for Bantu, a point of debate is the existence of a focus projection within the VP periphery that hosts post-verbal focused constituents.

Shortly after the presentation which led to this paper (i.e. Aboh 2006c), Hyman and Polinsky (2006) addressed this issue and concluded that the proposal in (36) should be rejected for an alternative that does away with the low focus position. Space limitations prevent me from discussing their proposal in any detail here. However, the paper involves a number of misrepresentations of my ideas as well as inconclusive suggestions that need to be made clear.

In their discussion of the proposal made in (35) and (36), Hyman and Polinsky (2006: 16) report that “Aboh follows Belletti (2002) in assuming that the vP periphery includes a focus phrase” as in (37) = their example (28).

(37) vP<FocusP<(TopicP)<VP

As the cautious reader would have noticed, (37) does not match the structure argued for in (35) and (36) where the topic and focus articulation projects at the edge and therefore dominates vP. More precisely, (37) should be as in (38).

(38) AspP<FocusP<(TopicP)<vP<VP

Obviously, this is not a trivial point of detail because it has consequences on the derivations I proposed for Aghem and Bantu, which in turn differ from the ones argued against in Hyman and Polinsky (2006). Take, for instance, their examples (30) and (31) (on page (17)), which were claimed to be problematic for the low focus hypothesis. As clearly shown by (36), verb movement to Asp in combination with object movement to [spec FocP] derive the so-called immediately post-verbal position. On the other hand, the object must scramble out when the verb (phrase) is being focused. In this case verb focus is achieved either by verb adjunction to Foc realised by *nó* or, along the lines of Nkemnji (1995), by remnant VP-movement to [spec FocP]. Deciding between these competing analyses goes beyond this paper, but the crucial point for the present discussion is that no additional stipulation is needed in the context of (36) to account for V-O_[Focus] versus O-V_[Focus] sequences in Aghem.⁴

⁴ A crucial point that was overlooked by Hyman and Polinsky (2006) is that representation (36) and its associated derivations are couched within Kayne’s (1994) antisymmetry syntax which excludes right-adjunction. Hyman and Polinsky (2006) instead assume free right-adjunction. This non-trivial difference suggests that evaluating these two approaches in a constructive manner requires a much

Similarly Hyman and Polinsky (2006: 16) state that: “Aboh makes the following assumptions for Aghem: the verb invariably moves to T, and the focus projection follows”. Here again, the reader would have noticed that the specific claim I make for Aghem is that the verb moves to Asp for aspect licensing. Accordingly, the argument that the verb does not move to T in Aghem is irrelevant to the proposal made here. Nevertheless, one can still wonder whether the ‘short verb movement’ (i.e. V-to-Asp movement) proposed here holds for Aghem. In this regard, I simply quote Hyman and Polinsky (2006: 8) who claimed: “we hypothesize that the verb raises to the head of a higher light verb phrase. This vP is possibly aspectual, which would account for the episodic interpretation found in presentational contexts”. Following this view, the authors further propose that inversion constructions such as (39a) should be assigned the partial representation in (39b).⁵

- (39) a. \acute{A} m̀̀ ñĩĩ tĩ-bvũ à̀̀z̀̀z̀̀
 there P2 run dogs yesterday
 ‘There ran dogs yesterday/The dogs RAN yesterday’
- b. [TP à [T m̀̀ [AspP [Asp ñĩĩ [vP tĩ-bvũ [v ñĩĩ [VP [V ñĩĩ]]]]]]]]]

If we leave aside the topic and focus articulation that I have adopted in this paper, it appears that the representation in (39b) uses the same ingredients as those in (35) and (36) and also assumes ‘short verb movement’ out of the VP to a higher aspect position, where it is licensed. Therefore, both this paper and Hyman and Polinsky make use of verb movement to Asp.

Finally, the authors report: “the focus-projection hypothesis assumes that *nó* is a phrasal head that takes the focussed constituent as its complement”. Here again, a correction is needed. Under the structure in (35) and (36), the focus head takes the focused phrase as its specifier not its complement. Given this, some of the tone alternations observed in Aghem and discussed in detail in Hyman and Polinsky could well be reformulated in terms of spec-head configuration or agreement, but I leave this for future work.

Another proposal that has been formulated recently as an alternative to the view adopted in this paper comes from Good (2006), who adopted a field-based analysis for postverbal focus in Naki (another grassfield Bantu language). It seems to me fair to say that Good’s (2006) theoretical premises and the ones underlying the cartography approach are too diverse to enable any direct critical evaluation that does justice to both frameworks. Accordingly, I cannot engage into any systematic evaluation of the field-based approach here. Consider, however, the following sequencing adopted by Good (2006: 17) as representative of the clause sequencing of Naki. Here a topic field precedes the predicate which in turn precedes a focus field.

- (40) [[] Topic Field [] Predicate [] Focus Field]

If we consider this sequencing in the context of the discussion in previous sections, it turns out that (40) is nothing but a sub-type of the sequencing in (34). Therefore it seems to me that the only difference between the cartography approach and

detailed and careful comparison than suggested by their paper.

⁵ These examples correspond to Hyman and Polinsky’s (2006) examples (13a) and (15), respectively.

something like (40) is that the former clearly asks the question of what the structural make-up of the identified fields is.

It appears from this discussion that the question of whether there is a structural low focus projection in Bantu remains a matter of enquiry and the jury is still out there deliberating. In what follows, I show that the analysis adopted here and illustrated in table (3) has a number of interesting implications for comparative syntax that are worth investigating carefully.

3. Some implications

The hypothesis that the clause structure embeds a low focus projection that realises the VP-periphery sheds some light on subject versus object asymmetry in *wh*-questions as well as the position of the focused verb across Kwa and Bantu.

3.1 Subject versus object asymmetry

I showed in section 2 that both Kwa and Bantu languages make use of the clausal left periphery for encoding focus. In this regard, it appeared that Kwa languages exhibit subject versus object asymmetry in *wh*-questions, as illustrated previously by examples (8) and (9). Consider again the object *wh*-question in Gungbe (41a). As indicated by the felicitous answers in (41b-c), the target of such questions, that is, the phrase representing new information may occur *in-situ* (41b) or *ex-situ* (41c). In the latter case, the dislocated constituent tends to encode (among other things) contrastive or corrective focus.

- (41) a. **Été** wè Kòfí dù? b. Kòfí dù **lésì**
 what Foc Kofi eat Kofi eat rice
 ‘What did Kofi eat?’ ‘Kofi ate RICE’
- c. **Lésì** wè Kòfí dù
 rice Foc Kofi eat
 ‘Kofi ate RICE’
- [Gungbe]

In the subject *wh*-question-answer pairs under (42), however, the target must front to the focus position and therefore occurs *ex-situ* (42c). A reply that contains a subject *in-situ* is ungrammatical (42b). Accordingly, the target of the subject *wh*-phrase is restricted to the clause-peripheral focus position only, where it occurs to the left of the focus marker *wè*. This is illustrated by the contrast in (42b) and (42c).

- (42) a. Ménù wè dù lésì?
 what Foc eat rice
 ‘Who ate rice?’
- b. *Kòfí dù lésì
 Kofi eat rice
 ‘KOFI ate rice’
- c. Kòfí wè dù lésì
 Kofi Foc eat rice
 ‘KOFI ate rice’

The question that we need to answer now is what allows *in-situ* and *ex-situ* strategies in the felicitous answers to object *wh*-questions, but forces the *ex-situ* strategy only for subject *wh*-questions.

Following the previous discussion, let us assume that the new information object focus in (41b) realises the low focus position, that is, [spec FocP]. If this is true, then we have a structural explanation for the ungrammatical example (42b)

involving the subject. Here, the subject is too high in the structure to exploit the low focus position. In accounting for this, Aboh (in press) proposes that the impossibility of the Gungbe subject *wh*-phrase to exploit the VP-peripheral position in question-answer pairs could be explained if we adopt the hypothesis that the subject must move to [spec TP] to check the EPP-feature under T (Chomsky 1995). Similarly, a focused constituent must move to the focus position [spec FocP]. Following Rizzi (1997) and Rizzi & Shlonsky (2006), let us assume that both [spec FocP] and [spec TP] are criterial positions. According to these authors, such positions are also freezing positions because the satisfaction of the focus or EPP criterion terminates the chain. The attracted element therefore becomes inactive and freezes in place. Given this, there appears to be a competition between the EPP feature and the focus feature when the subject is focused. Indeed, the movement of the subject to the low [spec FocP] will freeze the subject in place. Consequently the derivation will crash because the subject cannot check nominative case, nor can it check the EPP-feature under T. Similarly, movement to [spec TP] for case and EPP, by passing the low focus position, freezes the subject in place. Consequently, the subject will not be able to check its focus feature. Accordingly, the only option available for subject focusing in this language will be for the subject constituent to move obligatorily to the clause peripheral focus position, from where it controls (under *c*-command), an empty category (e.g. *pro*) in [spec TP]. This empty category checks EPP under T (43). I further assume that nominative case is checked under Agree (Chomsky 2005).

- (43) a. [_{FocP} Ménéù [_{Foc} wè [...[_{TP} *pro*_{ménéù} [_{AspP} [_{FocP} [_{Foc} [_{VP} *t*_{ménéù} *ɔ̀ù lé̀sì*]]]]]]]]]]
 b. [_{FocP} Kòfí [_{Foc} wè [...[_{TP} *pro*_{Kòfí} [_{AspP} [_{FocP} [_{Foc} [_{VP} *t*_{Kòfí} *ɔ̀ù lé̀sì*]]]]]]]]]]

I claim that obligatory control in such cases is due to the paucity of agreement morphology as well as the lack of DP-expletives in Gbe.

Interestingly, objects do not fall within the realm of this competition precisely because they are not subject to the EPP. Therefore no tension between the EPP and the focus feature arises, and objects can exploit both the low and high focus positions in question-answer pairs. As it appears, languages tend to assign different interpretations (i.e. new versus identificational focus) to these positions, though this might be an artefact rather than a genuine structural distinction (see Aboh, in press). The described strategies are represented in (44b-c) as answer to (44a).

- (44) a. [_{FocP} Ménéù [_{Foc} wè [_{FP} *t*_{ménéù} [_{TP} Kòfí [_{AspP} [_{FocP} [_{Foc} [_{VP} *t*_{Kòfí} *dà t*_{ménéù}]]]]]]]]]]
 b. [_{FocP} [_{Foc} [...[_{TP} Kòfí [_{AspP} [_{Asp} *dà* [_{FocP} Màrí [_{Foc} [_{VP} *t*_{Kòfí} *t*_{dà} *t*_{Màrí}]]]]]]]]]]
 c. [_{FocP} Màrí [_{Foc} wè [_{FP} *t*_{Màrí} [_{TP} Kòfí [_{AspP} [_{FocP} [_{Foc} [_{VP} *t*_{Kòfí} *dà t*_{Màrí}]]]]]]]]]]

What this analysis predicts is that in languages with an expletive, the competition between the EPP/nominative case and the focus feature should be resolved because the subject can check its focus feature in the low focus position, while an expletive will merge in [spec TP] to check the EPP. Again here, nominative case will be checked under Agree.

Interestingly enough, this description coincides exactly with Bantu. In some of these languages that exclusively or mainly exploit the low focus position (e.g. Aghem), the subject checks the focus feature under the low focus head, while an expletive is inserted in [spec TP] that checks the EPP under T. The situation is described again in (45a-b).

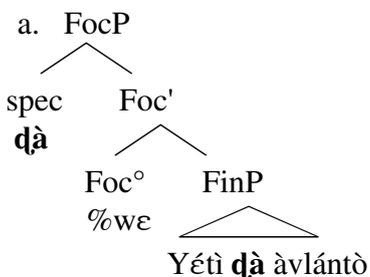
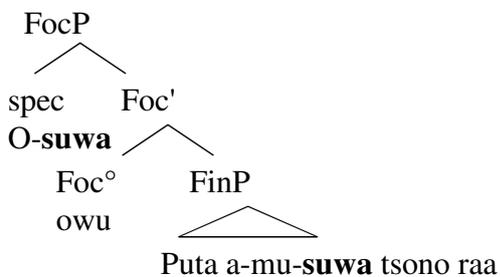
- (48) a. **Ḑà** %wè Yéti **ḑà** àvlántò [Gungbe]
 Marry Foc Yeti cook plantain
 ‘Yeti COOKED plantain’
- b. **O-suwa** owu Puta a-mu-**suwa** tsono raa
 Inf-wash Foc Puta SM-P1-wash clothes her
 Puta WASHED her clothes’
 [Tuki, Biloa 1997: 10]
- c. V_[Focus].....Subject.....V.....Object

In contrast, Nweh displays the pattern in (49a) and schematized in (49b). As the reader may notice here, Nweh realises to the right what Gungbe and Tuki express to the left. As a consequence, while the focused verb occurs sentence-initially in these languages, it surfaces sentence-finally in Nweh.

- (49) a. Atem a kè? nčúū akendòŋ čúū
 Atem Agr P1 boil plantains Ø-boil
 ‘Atem BOILED plantains’
 [Nweh, Nkemnji 1995: 138]
- b. Subject.....V.....O.....V_[Focus]

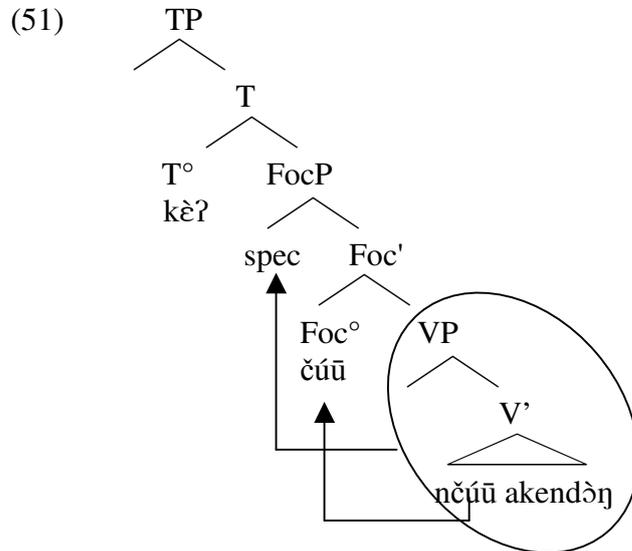
If we treat leftward and rightward focusing in parallel, it is clear from the Nweh example that the position occupied by the focused verb (even in non-doubling cases, e.g. in Aghem) is structurally different from the position it normally sits in, when licensed for aspect. Given this, it seems to me that alternative analyses of focus in terms of right adjunction (e.g. Hyman & Polinsky 2006), or focus field (e.g. Good 2006) have nothing to offer as to why the focused verb occurs in a structurally different position and spells out twice in a mirror image of what we find generally in Kwa (and in some Bantu languages). That the distribution of the focused verb appears so symmetric and that verb focusing often relates to doubling phenomena across these languages suggest to me that there must be some deep structural reason for it.

Following Aboh (2003, 2004a, 2006b), Aboh & Dyakonova (2006), I therefore propose that verb focus in Gungbe and Tuki involves displacement of the focused verb (phrase) in sentence-initial position, while the doublet occurs IP-internally. Under this analysis, examples (48a) and (48b) can be represented as in (50a) and (50b), respectively.⁷

- (50) a. 
- b. 

⁷ See Aboh (2006b) and Aboh & Dyakonova (2006) for analyses of verb focusing with doubling as instances of parallel chains.

With regard to the Nweh example (49), Nkemnji (1995) proposes that the focused verb moves into the head of a ‘low’ focus phrase, followed by raising of VP to [spec FocP], as in (51).



Needless to say Nkemnji's (1995) work is perfectly compatible with the view adopted here.

4. Conclusion

This paper shows that a comparison between Kwa and Bantu based on information packaging sheds some light on how information structure maps onto clause structure. It appears from the discussion that Bantu and Kwa languages provide strong empirical evidence for the existence of two focus fields inside the clause structure: one in the left periphery and one in the VP area. Following the cartographic approach that focus and topic features are properties of functional heads that compose the clausal left periphery (Rizzi 1997), and assuming that there is an edge to the VP that is similar to the clausal left periphery (Belletti 2002), this amounts to saying that there are topic and focus projections both within the clausal left periphery and the VP periphery. The proposed analysis indicates that certain contrasts between Kwa and Bantu (e.g. post-verbal subject, predicate cleft, expletive constructions) reduce to whether the lower or higher focus phrases, or both are activated.

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